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Unicode Technical Note #21: Tamil Numbers

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Originally, Tamils did not use zero, nor did they use positional digits (having separate symbols for the numbers 10, 100 and 1000). Symbols for the numbers are similar to other Tamil letters, with some minor changes.

For example, the number 3782 is not written as ๓๗๘๒ as in modern usage. Instead it is written as ๓ ๗๐ ๗ ๑๐ ๘ ๐ ๒. This would be read as they are written as Three Thousands, Seven Hundreds, Eight Tens, Two; or in Tamil as மூன்று-ஆயிரத்து-எழு-நூற்று-எண்-பத்து-இரண்டு. [1]

Reference [1] uses Tamil numerals for Chapter numbers. This usage is based on modern practice, using both positional digits and zero.

Reference [2] gives a list of numerals in the ancient format, with some equivalents in modern format, some in Arabic numerals, and a few in words. The list is reproduced below with Arabic equivalents, and a few modern word equivalents.

க = 1

உ = 2

ங = 3

ச = 4

ஞ = 5

ட = 6

ண = 7

அ = 8

ஙை = 9

ய = 10

யக = 11

யஉ = 12

யங = 13

யச = 14

൰ = 15

൱ = 16

൲ = 17

൳ = 18

൴ = 19

൵ = 20

൶ = 100

൵൶ = 200

൷൶ = 300

൶൰൱ = 156

൸ = 1000

൸൹ = 1001

൸ൺ = 1040

ൻ൸ = 8000

ൻ = 10,000

൹ൻ = 70,000

ൺൻ = 90,000

൶ൻ = 100,000 (lakh)

ൻ൶ = 800,000

൷൶ൻ = 1,000,000 (10 lakhs)

ൺ൷൶ൻ = 9,000,000

൶൶ൻ = 10,000,000 (crore)

൷൶൶ൻ = 100,000,000 (10 crore)

൶൶൶ൻ = 1,000,000,000 (100 crore)

൸൶൶൶ൻ = 10,000,000,000 (thousand crore)

ൻ൸൶൶൶ൻ = 100,000,000,000 (10 thousand crore)

൶ൻ൸൶൶൶ൻ = 1,000,000,000,000 (lakh crore)

൶൶ൻ൸൶൶൶ൻ = 100,000,000,000,000 (crore crore)

[1] mozi varalARu, by munucAmi varatarAcan, published by The South India Saiva Siddhanta Works Publishing Society, Tinnevelly, Limited, November 1954, p. 357-358 (page numbers from 14th Edition, December 1996).

[2] iniya tamiz ilakkaNam by yokisri cuttAnan~ta pAratiyAr, published by Kavitha Publications, p. 201-204. Scanned source from URL: http://www.geocities.com/Athens/5180/numeral.html